

1 February 2019

## Seniors celebrate cultural connections

A Victorian-first Multicultural Wellness Centre (MWC) in Melbourne's east is connecting seniors and combating social isolation.

The MWC, run by non-profit organisation VMCH, in Wantirna South has gone from strength to strength since it opened in 2016. It was the first Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)-specific, integrated, aged-focused wellness centre in the state.

Every day of the week, multiculturalism is celebrated and seniors from Chinese, Filipino and Sri Lankan backgrounds solidify connections to their cultural roots.

On February 5, the centre's most popular group, for Chinese seniors, will be a hub of activity as they ring in the Chinese New Year.

Creating and hanging decorations, undertaking traditional customs and joining for the annual 'Reunion Lunch' are all part of the festivities.

**Australian Institute for Health and Welfare data shows nearly one third of all Victorians over 65 years are from a CALD background.**

**COTA Victoria also reports the risk of loneliness in old age is higher among migrant and refugee populations.**

MWC Coordinator Rani Wong agreed. She said celebrating Chinese New Year was sometimes challenging for older migrants.

"The festival is not celebrated here the way it would have been in their country of birth. For seniors, every festival will remind them their own town and own home overseas. We hope our social groups help them to connect to their own cultural events and make them feel part of the 'big family' we've created at the MCW."

Michael Liu and his wife Ann have been MWC members for three years. Michael said he's made many friends and enjoys the excises classes, especially Tai Chi.

"The group is very good – it gives Chinese people a social life and we can get help if we need it."

Recently, Ann became ill and Rani referred Michael to the VMCH Carer Support Program for help.

"She can't do the housework or cooking so the program is helping us with that – I'm very appreciative," Michael said.

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Rani said due to language barriers and limited mobility, most of the seniors attending the group were “house bound”.

“Hence, it is so important for older people from CALD backgrounds to connect into the community they are familiar and comfortable with and to be connected to age services as they require.”

**For more information on the VMCH MWC, call [\(03\) 9800 7255](tel:0398007255) .**

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### **About Villa Maria Catholic Homes**

Through our passion and commitment to everyday people, Villa Maria Catholic Homes (VMCH) works in partnership with people of all ages and abilities. From all faiths and backgrounds, to achieve their goals, remain connected to their community and maintain independence.

We're a Catholic not-for-profit organisation, providing services to 7,600 people across Victoria. Ask anyone at VMCH and you'll find we're driven by wanting to achieve outcomes that enhance the lives of older Australians, people with disability, families and carers.

We have a long history in listening to what people want and need. By making sure we can deliver services to match those needs, we can offer greater choice and opportunity to our customers. We want to help build compassionate and sustainable communities, so everyone is included.

Today we offer services that cover affordable housing options, residential aged care, retirement living, home community and disability services and specialist education. We're an agile organisation constantly improving how we do things.

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